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DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON THE DAY OF THE
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NATIONAL FAST,

JUNE 1, 1865,

AT THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

CUMBERLAND CENTRE, ME.

BY REV. E. S. JORDAN.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CONGREGATION.



PORTLAND:
PRINTED BY DAVID TUCKER.
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DISCOURSE.

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL BE IN EVERLASTING REMEMBRANCE.—Ps. cxii. 6.

A righteous man, one who loves and practices justice and mercy, will live in the memory of successive generations.

The idea of the text is not merely that his name will be preserved in history, but that it will be cherished with kindly remembrance by those in whose memory a righteous man would desire to live.

The names of *bad* men go down on the pages of history.

When Erostratus, the incendiary of the great temple of Ephesus, was put to the torture, he confessed that his only motive for setting fire to that magnificent structure, was that his name might go down to posterity.

And it is probable that history will preserve the name of the assassin of our late President on the same page with his own. But while the one shall be in everlasting remembrance, the other shall be spoken with horror and everlasting contempt.

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky, February 12, 1809. It has been noticed that his birth day occurs in the same month with that of Washington. For a long time we have been accustomed to celebrate the 22d of February as the birth day of Geo. Washington, the father of his country. Hereafter there will be thousands and millions who will commemorate the 12th of February as the birth day of Abraham Lincoln, the savior of his country.

Both were born in slave States, yet both were sufficiently

free from prejudice to perceive the injustice and dangerous tendency of the system of slavery.

It was however a part of the Divine plan that Abraham Lincoln should not be brought up in a slave State. It may be that his father, Thomas Lincoln, had seen enough of the institution to convince him of its degrading effects on the poor whites of the South, and that, therefore, he determined to emigrate to a free State. When his son Abraham was seven years old, he removed from Kentucky to Indiana. Here father and son toiled together in clearing up the wild land of that new territory. Until he was nineteen he was strengthening his constitution by vigorous labor amid the western forests. He was thus enabled to acquire a practical knowledge of the structure of American society.

If a master of a vessel would command the respect of his crew, he must understand their duties as well as his own. Let him who would be the master of his ship, and be secure from imposition, begin before the mast.

So began young Lincoln at the bottom of society, and came up by force of his own character, and by Providential guidance to be master of this great ship of State.

At the age of nineteen he made one trip or more in a flat-boat down the Mississippi.

About the time of his majority he accompanied his father to Illinois where he helped him build, not a palace in which kings are reared, but a log hut in which any American President may pass his youth. It was here, too, that he earned the appellation at which aristocrats have sneered, of "The Rail-Splitter." Listen, ye soft-handed princes, and noblemen of the old world, and you, their sycophantic imitators of the new, the future President of the United States helped his father split rails sufficient to fence ten acres of land!

At the age of twenty-two,—attend again, ye who despise the poor toiling millions,—he hired out for ten dollars a

month to help his employer build a flat-boat; and afterwards he worked as one of the hands in navigating it to New Orleans. His employer, finding him trustworthy, put him in charge of a store and a mill.

When he was twenty-three, he enlisted in what was called the "Black Hawk war." He was soon promoted to be Captain,—with which he has been heard to say, that he was more pleased than with any other success of his life.

Soon after he was nominated as a candidate for Representative to the Legislature; and, though he failed of an election, yet the fact that his own town gave him 277 votes, while only 7 were cast against him, shows how highly he was esteemed by those who knew him best.

About this time his fellow citizens desired him to accept the office of Post Master, and he received the appointment.

And in all these years of toil he was intellectually active. He was studying nature, men and the laws of men. Neither did he forget the laws of God. It has been well said, that "of books he had the *best* in that volume which, beyond all others, yields the most nutritious intellectual aliment, and has in all ages given, instrumentally, the greatest moral heroes to the world. He knew and revered those holy principles of right and justice, which had come to him in his forest home with the seal and stamp of Divine authority."

But while the immutable words of inspiration were thus moulding his character, he did not neglect such other sources of knowledge as were within his reach. He would go to a law office, as it was about to be closed for the night, and borrow books to be returned the next morning. He also qualified himself to practice as a Surveyor of land.

When he was twenty-five years of age his friends made another effort—and this time successful—to elect him to the legislature, of which he was a member several sessions.

At twenty-eight he removed to Springfield where he com-

menced the practice of law, in which he was eminently successful. His industry, fidelity and ability, secured him a large patronage.

Ten years later he was sent to Congress. Five years ago he was nominated for the Presidency of the United States, and was elected in the autumn of 1860. Four eventful years of service commended him to his countrymen for re-election. Six weeks after he had entered upon his new term while the dark clouds which had hung about the national horizon were breaking away, he was permitted to ascend as into the top of Nebo, and survey the great land which God was giving to his people; but another leader was to conduct them in to possess it.

He was not known as a national man until 1858, when he canvassed the State of Illinois in opposition to Stephen A. Douglass, as a candidate for the United States Senate. Mr. Douglass succeeded, but he acknowledged the ability and honesty of his competitor. Though of politically different views, they were personal friends. I had an opportunity of hearing Mr. Douglass when he was in this State five years ago. I remember that while he was on his way from the State capital addressing crowds at every station, when some had the ill grace to cheer for his opponent, Mr. Douglass had the magnanimity to say, in substance, "I thank you for that. Mr. Lincoln is my friend. He is known to the country through me." It was those speeches in opposition to Mr. Douglass which suggested his name as a suitable candidate for the Presidency.

Many have been the heart-felt tributes which have been paid, through the length and breadth of our country, to President Lincoln. The *fact* that grief so universal and so sincere was awakened by his death has become a matter of history. This common and spontaneous tribute of tears will aid future generations in making up their verdict concerning his character. The greatest living orators have brought their meeds

of eloquence ; and poets are laying their wreaths on his bier. The air, with here and there an exception, which only renders the praise more apparent, has been vocal with his virtues.

Just as great musical composers sometimes drop in notes of discord, which only render the harmony more noticeable ; so these notes of enmity, which arise here and there against our martyred President, will but render the harmony more observable, as it echoes through the ages.

But he has been taken from us ; and we come to-day, in common with our countrymen all over our land, to bow ourselves beneath the chastising blow, and humbly to ask why it may have fallen. We cannot doubt that love for the martyr as well as regard for the best interests of the nation that mourns him, suffered the assassin to execute his purpose. All that God suffers he will overrule for the accomplishment of an infinitely wise and holy plan.

Some of us remember the story, that once in the Crimean campaign, a cannon ball, discharged at a regiment of veterans, came tearing its way through their columns, leaving their broken ranks wide asunder, and the hearts of the survivors heavy with sorrow, as they saw the manly forms of their comrades weltering in their blood. But the work of that cannon ball was not done. It had not spent its momentum in its mission of *death*. It hastens now on its work of *mercy*. It buries itself in the green hill-side ; and up from the spot where it strikes, there issues a pure stream of cool water ; and thousands of soldiers thereafter slake their thirst at its grateful fountain.

So flew the messenger of death that took the life of our beloved Chief. Its work was not accomplished when the assassin's deed was done. It must speed on its way, and open a remedial fountain for the nation. And while we sit in sack-cloth for our loss, and humbly say, Thy will be done ; in no presuming spirit might we ask what that WILL may be.

And one design of this mysterious providence undoubtedly is, to rebuke our proclivity to rely on an arm of flesh.

Perhaps there was danger of our listening to a voice, saying, Peace, now, O weary nation! Your staunch Ship of State has outrode the storms. You have the most skillful commanders, and may well trust the future to them. Lie on your oars and rest. You have given to humanity your bravest and dearest. You have lifted up the heart and the voice in strong crying and tears to Him who rules over all. But the night is now passing. The morning star is sending his beams over the land. You may now cease from praying and pleading with God for your dear friends, and your beloved land. Did not the Divine eye behold such a feeling springing up? And may not this have been one reason for taking from us the human staff, frail as a reed, upon which we were already beginning to lean?

Another design in suffering this appalling crime may be to impress on the nation the character of our murdered President.

There is something so subduing in the manner and suddenness of his death, and the great heart of the nation has been so melted by it, that the virtues of the victim must needs be stamped on the national character.

There can be no doubt that the influence of his character on our own, and coming generations, will be far greater than if he had lived to a good old age, and died a natural death.

One prominent characteristic thus stamped on the hearts of his countrymen, was an unfaltering confidence in God, as the Being who, in answer to prayer, directs all human affairs.

In that parting address to his neighbors at the railway station, just before the cars bore him to his vast duties and responsibilities, he sounded the key-note to all his future acts. His remarks will bear repetition.

“ My friends! No one, not in my position, can appreciate

the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century. Here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. I know not how soon I shall see you again. A duty devolves upon me which is perhaps greater than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine aid which sustained him. In the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support; and I hope you, my friends, will pray that I may receive the Divine assistance, without which, I cannot succeed, and with which success is certain. Again I bid you all an affectionate farewell."

How little did he or they think, that, after four years of anxious thought and unparalleled labor, he would be borne back to that station in the silence of death.

The same great truth seemed continually impressed on his mind during his entire journey to the capital. At Buffalo we hear him saying, in reference to the task imposed on him:—“I am sure I bring a heart true to the work. For the ability to perform it, I trust in that Supreme Being who has never forsaken this favored land. Without that assistance I shall surely fail. With it I cannot fail.”

After he had assumed the duties of his office, what but a firm reliance on the Ruler of nations could have enabled him to preserve such equanimity, in the face of a task too great for a mortal in his own strength to bear up under? What but his confidence in the Ruler of the storms could have imparted courage to walk upon the raging sea of our public affairs with such composure? Those of us who have remained in our quiet homes during these four years of battle, will never be able to appreciate the magnitude of the preparations which had been made to secure the success of the rebellion. And therefore

we shall never comprehend the perplexities which surrounded the Patriot of the West when he was placed at the helm of our Ship of State, which seemed to be going to wreck by reason of the great mutiny.

If we could see their numerous forts, as strong as military skill could build them, with the thousands of heavy pieces of artillery which frowned from their battlements ; if we could see the hundreds of torpedoes, which had been sunk in harbors, and rivers, so as apparently to ensure the destruction of any vessels which might approach them ; if we could behold their vast armies, and their brave and determined leaders, we should have a clearer idea of the power which was arrayed against the government, and should confess as he did, that the work devolving on Abraham Lincoln, was greater than that devolving on any other man since the days of Washington.

Besides, as is always the case in an internal dissension, there was a very large minority, who, openly or secretly, sympathized with the rebels. It was quite impossible to determine whom to trust. Turning his eyes southward, the President saw a united band all prepared for battle.

Looking northward he saw a thrifty, industrious population unaccustomed to the arts of war, and not all ready to unite with him in maintaining the integrity of the Union.

Looking southward, he beheld by far the larger portion of the heavy armament of the nation, waiting the new order of things, ready to belch destruction against their prospective antagonists.

Looking northward, he saw our forts and arsenals comparatively destitute of arms, our navy yards vacant, while our ships of war were riding at anchor in foreign ports, or scattered on distant seas. And the traitorous Secretary of War, under the out-going administration, had taken special care that there should be but few loyal men in any Southern fort. The forts in Charleston harbor, for example, were manned by only

fourscore men. Our small standing army, consisting of about ten thousand men, had been so disposed of that they could be of no avail to the new administration. Many of the commanders in both the army and navy were in sympathy with the secessionists.

Mr. Cameron, the first Secretary of War under President Lincoln, has put on record the condition of affairs when he entered on the duties of his office. He says:—"I found the Department destitute of all means of defence, without guns, and with little prospect of purchasing the *materiel* of war. I found the nation without an army; and I found scarcely a man throughout the whole War Department in whom I could put my trust."

About this time a rebel paper encouraged the conspiracy by the statement, that, by one order, Floyd had removed from the North, 115,000 muskets and rifles, which had been distributed in various southern arsenals.

Another paper stated that by Floyd's management, and by purchase, there were nearly a million stand of arms and of revolvers, in the possession of southern leaders.

The preparations, in all respects, were immense, and the northern people had no idea of their magnitude, nor of the vastness of the struggle necessary to meet and overcome them. It is not to be wondered at, that the rebel legislature received the President's order, calling out seventy-five thousand men, with shouts of ridicule.

And yet in these days which tried the souls of the loyal portion of the American people, and those most who knew most of affairs, Abraham Lincoln never despaired of the Republic. He *could* not, because he confided in the justice of God and in the righteousness of the cause he had espoused. Far down the future, he saw the beam inclining to the side of mercy and justice at last; and so was calm.

" His steps were slow, yet forward still
He pressed, where others paused or failed ;
His calm star clomb with constant will,
While restless meteors flashed, and paled."

Another trait which I hope will be indelibly impressed on the character of the American people, was his sympathy for the poor and friendless.

There is no evil which glides into old communities more stealthily than an aristocratic separation into classes. Society has been so effectually severed in some of the ancient nations of the East, that a person of a higher caste would be struck dumb with horror to be found eating with one below him, or even to eat from a dish which he had touched. This is an extreme of aristocratic distinctions. A great effort has been made within the past few years, to introduce an aristocracy even into New England. It has long existed at the South. There has been an entire separation, for several generations, between the laborer and the gentleman. We have but little idea of the impregnable barrier that existed between them. A statement of a Southern minister who lectured in this place some months ago, will illustrate this. He asked for a brush and blacking for his boots. He said the first time he blacked his own boots after coming north, he could not suppress a feeling of shame, and cast furtive glances around him to see whether there was any witness of his degradation ! " Now," said he, " I thank God that I am in a State where I can black my own boots without disgrace."

It was perfectly natural, but very unfortunate for southern society, to cherish the idea that labor was degrading, fit only for the African slave, and his sordid northern sympathizer. It has a very hardening influence to regard it as perfectly honorable to live on the unremunerated toil of others, and to hold it a shame to be seen engaged in any kind of manual labor for one's-self. Society must be corrupt where labor is considered a disgrace.

In such society, the time which in youth should be spent in healthful toil, will be given up to pleasure and passion. Woe be to the Republic, if the day shall ever arrive when her sons shall scorn labor.

The idea that labor is a sufficient barrier to the highest social and political positions, is not indigenous to our shores. It is an exotic; and belongs on this continent no more than royalty with its privileged classes, its nobility, and its courts. It ought almost to be regarded as treason against our democratic institutions to attempt to introduce an aristocracy into New England. The Puritan fathers would almost spring from their quiet resting places on our rock-bound coast, to cry out against such a violation of the principles they laid down their lives to establish. The ocean which guards their graves would almost receive a tongue and say; "It was not for this, O degenerate sons of the Puritans, that I bore them to this shore." The rivers would murmur, and the hills, and valleys, and forests would echo their maledictions against even the appearance of such an innovation.

When our ancestors came to New England they broke away from the old feudal principles. They established an equality of social position. And this has given to the world some of the greatest men of modern times. It raised Franklin from his printer's desk to the highest rank among Philosophers. It took Putnam from his plow, and Greene from his anvil. It took Andrew Jackson from his Irish parents and placed him in the front rank of our civil and military leaders. It brought Webster from his father's farm in the Granite State, to perhaps, the most commanding position attained by any American orator. In every department it has given to the world its greatest benefactors.

In such an era as this, while the principles of this Republic are being moulded for future generations, it is a cause of

gratitude, that both the civil leaders of the nation should be of the most plebeian origin. There is a providence and a prophecy in the fact, that these two sons of toil should be elevated to the highest office within the gift of the people ; and when the one was taken that his mantle fell on another of equally humble parentage.

It was in a little old house, with unpainted walls, and but one room twelve feet square, and an open garret, that Abraham Lincoln's successor was born. It was in that humble home, in the city of Raleigh, that at the age of fourteen he began to learn the alphabet. It was in that he lived when he was apprenticed to a tailor. Near by is the burial place of his father, a small dark stone with the simple initials of his name, marks the resting-place of the father of our President.

May the elevation of two such men to the highest office in the nation, at this important period of our history, long postpone the day when American youth will prefer as a model, polished villainy to uncultivated honesty !

Moses was linked by birth with the oppressed people of Egypt ; and he ever preferred to suffer affliction with them, rather than to be called the son of a king's daughter. So were the sons of the poor chosen to lead this nation from bondage, and as the one was true even to the melancholy night when his work was ended, so have we reason to believe the other will be.

But whatever may be the course of his successor, Abraham Lincoln certainly sympathized with the poor and friendless.

Mr. Carpenter, the Artist, who was so long at the White House engaged on his great painting of President Lincoln and his Cabinet, says :—" I have known him to sit for hours, patiently listening to tales of domestic troubles from poor people, carefully sifting the facts, and manifesting as much anxiety to do exactly right, as in matters of the gravest interest.

Poorly-clad people were more likely to get a hearing, than those who came in silks and velvets. No one was ever turned away from his door because of poverty. It was a constant marvel to me, that, with all his other cares and duties, he could give so much time, and be so patient with this multitude."

His sympathies were early enlisted for the African race. They were poor, but they found a friend in him. He was urged, not more by military necessity than by his strong sympathy for the oppressed, to proclaim them free. His love of mercy as well as of justice impelled him to lift up his voice and sound the key-note of emancipation in the ears of the nation, just arousing to a sense of its dangers and its duties.

It was a mercy, for which the ages to come will be more thankful than we, that a man occupied the Executive Chair, who, in all the tender sentiments, was in advance of the National feeling, otherwise slavery and the nation might have lived or died together. It was nearly three years ago that he resolved on this step; and two and a half since he wrote:— "I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free. And that the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons."

"And upon this, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

I must not detain you to speak of other traits of the departed patriot, which it is to be hoped, will be stamped on the present and future generations of our country; but will pass to a final lesson, which, in the midst of our mourning, God is teaching the world, viz: that neither regal authority, nor aristocratic influence is necessary to the perpetuity of a nation's life.

When the war burst so suddenly on the world, it was expected by the nations of Europe, that we should but add another to the wrecks of the few democratic forms of government which have preceded us. The sentiment of very many intelligent men abroad was represented by that remark of a correspondent of the London Times :—"The great Republican bubble has burst." Now the tone of the London Times has changed. In a copy, which a friend has put into my hands during the present week, I read :—"Those who have staked their political faith on the expected disruption of democracy have prepared for themselves a signal defeat. Democracy has reaped this advantage, that it has had the opportunity of disproving the charge of *weakness*, which is often laid at its door. It has been vulgarly supposed that democracy is necessarily incompatible with strength and vigor of executive action. That delusion the American struggle has dispelled. It has been thought that democracies were necessarily fickle to their rulers, unstable in their policy, and wavering in their determination. That, too, the democracy of America has disproved. It has been said that democracies are necessarily violent and cruel in their disposition, and that, from impatience of discipline and obedience, they are unapt for Military success. No man can say that now. It has been said that democracies would not support the expenses of war and the burdens of taxation. That is proved not to be the case. No autocrat that the world has ever seen, has received a more firm and unbounded support, and commanded more unlimited resources than those which the American people have placed at the disposal of Mr. Lincoln."

To show the feeling which this mournful event has drawn out in France also, I will quote a few lines from one of her leading journals :—

"Abraham Lincoln receives his reward. The two worlds are mourning his death. What is specially striking and note-

worthy in the effect produced here by this unexpected news, is the universal conviction that the death of one man, however great he may be, can neither disturb the affairs, nor shake the institutions of the American Republic. We see Andrew Johnson twelve hours after the death of Lincoln bow before the National representation, speak not of his rights, but of his duties, and declare that he will faithfully fulfil them. The United States have the freest, the gentlest, and at the same time, the strongest government on earth."

Was it not then one design of Providence in permitting this appalling crime, to show to the nations of the old world, that the strength of a democratic government lies not in the influence of one man, but in the education and liberty of the people.

And it is a striking providence that this event is calling out the sympathy and good-will of the masses in the old world as nothing else could. In the great cities, in villages and neighborhoods, men have gathered together, and talked over this sad event, with as much apparent interest and grief, as in the land which claimed him as its own. The animosity which, a few weeks since, seemed to exist between this and rival nations over the sea, has to a great degree, been buried in the grave of the Martyr of Freedom.

His work is now done.

Whitefield predicted that God had suffered him to speak and labor so much in health, that he would have nothing for him to do in his last hours, and that he should die silent. And his prediction was verified. In like manner, motionless and silent passed the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. His labors were ended in health and vigor. In the language of a poem he loved to repeat :

* * * * *

"Like a swift, fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

“ ‘Tis the wink of an eye, ‘tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,—
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud,
O, why should the spirit of mortal be proud.”

History tells us that when William, Prince of Orange, who at the age of fifty-two, became a martyr to his country's cause, received a mortal wound by the pistol shot of a young assassin, he fell and died with the prayer on his lips, “ O my God, have compassion on me, and my poor country.”

But so suddenly passed the soul of our martyred Chief, that he had no time to repeat the prayer which he had often uttered, “ O God, have mercy on me, and my poor country.”

To-day his countrymen, with a melancholy gratitude, and with his name embalmed in millions of hearts, pay their last national tribute to his memory.

With the hope that his character for industry, and temperance, for simplicity in taste and integrity of purpose, for unaffected sympathy with the poor and friendless, for unwavering devotion to the cause of his country and the best interests of humanity; and for unfaltering trust in God, may be impressed on the nation, we commend him to history.

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